

The State of the University Senate

6 February 2012

The purpose of the Senate is to execute the functions of academic governance, subject to the Policies of the SUNY Board of Trustees. The rules and policies approved by the University Senate shall govern the academic functions of the University consistent with the Policies of the Board of Trustees.

The State of the Senate is HEALTHY

We are a Senate of Senates. There are 3 college-level Senates: Arts & Sciences, Engineering and the Health Sciences Center (HSC). The HSC Senate itself is composed of Senates from each of the 5 schools that comprise the HSC.

We are a representative senate; the University Senate - this body - consists of representatives from 44 departments on campus, as well as at-large senators, senators selected by the PEG board, the GSO, and the USG.

We are all volunteers, and we are all overworked, but we are here because we are dedicated to this University, and its mission.

There are 103 elected members of the University Senate as of this date. Of them, 61 are faculty, 22 are professional staff, and 20 are students. Eleven are new members this year. This ~10% annual turnover is typical.

At any one time over 10% of the faculty are associated with the Senate and its various college-level senates.

Despite these impressive numbers, we can do better. There are 7 Departments that have not elected Senators, and there are a number of open at-large seats. Complacency on the part of the Senate, apathy on the part of the departments, and often poor lines of communication are all to blame.

This is not a problem, because

the State of the Senate is ACTIVE

As those of you who come here regularly know, the work of the Senate is not done in this chamber. We meet here, or somewhere else, monthly, to present the occasional resolution for discussion and approval, and to hear informational presentations. Departmental senators are expected to inform their respective departments about the activities of the Senate.

But this is not where the work of the Senate transpires. The heavy labor is done in our 13 standing committees, each of which works closely with its cognate administrator to further the mission of the University.

The standing committees of the University Senate and their cognate administrators are:

Administrative Review	President's Office
Academic Planning and Resource Allocation	Provost
Educational Services	TLT director
Graduate Council	Dean of the Graduate School
Information Technology	CIO
Library Promotion and Tenure	Dean of Libraries
Library Services	Dean of Libraries
Research Services	VP for Research
SPD Council	Dean of SPD
Student Life	VP for Student Affairs
Undergraduate Council	Provost's Office
University Affairs	VP for External Relations
University Environment	VP for Facilities

127 members of the faculty, 25 members of the professional staff, and about two dozen students, both graduate and undergraduate, serve on standing committees of the Senate. There is some overlap, but most members of the Senate's standing committees are not also departmental or at-large senators. Elections for seats on the standing committees are often contested.

In general the standing committees have well-established relations with their cognate administrators, and work productively with them.

I announce today a restructuring of the relation between the Senate Executive Committee and the standing committees. In the past we relied on semi-annual Coordinating Council meetings between the standing committee chairs and the Executive Committee to facilitate communication between the various committees, and to see that they cooperate on items of overlapping interest. The Coordinating Council meetings have grown unwieldy, and there is no clear line of communication between the committees and the Executive Committee, other than through me. I can be a significant bottleneck. Starting this semester, each standing committee will have assigned to it a member of the Executive Committee, who will act as a liaison, to facilitate communications between the committees and the Executive Committee. We will arrange for a retreat for all the standing committee chairs at least once a year to engender mutual communications.

Because of the diligent work of our standing committees,
the State of the Senate is EFFECTIVE

In the past semester, we have

- Discussed and approved new class vectors.
- Approved a restructuring of the Senate's standing committees, to create the Educational Services Committee, and to transform the former Computing and Communications Committee into the Information Services Committee, an umbrella committee with members from other relevant standing committees.
- Discussed and approved a GSO resolution on Shared Service Centers
- Discussed and approved resolutions on Access to Course Evaluation Data, and on Course Syllabi

- Discussed and approved a USG Resolution on Recreational Athletics Fields
 - Discussed and approved a resolution on facilitating research on campus
 - Heard the Research Committee Facilities and Infrastructure Survey Report
 - Discussed the new calendar
 - Discussed and approved two resolutions on Shared Service Centers, one from the Arts & Sciences Senate and the other from the Executive Committee of this Senate.
 - Commissioned the biennial survey of Administrative Functions.
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- We invited Barbara Chernow and Dexter Bailey to present updates on Campus Construction, and on University Advancement, respectively

The State of the Senate is GUARDED

There is a new and unpleasant tension between the Senate and the administration over the concept of shared governance. For most of its history, Stony Brook University has thrived under the mantle of shared governance, wherein the administration and the faculty, staff and students, through the auspices of the various senates, work cooperatively to run this University. While the administration is tasked with making the University operate on a day-to-day basis, the faculty and staff have the collective knowledge to advise the administration of appropriate courses of action. As the President writes in his report this month, there are some of us who have served this University for 45 years or more.

When the administration prefers to operate in a vacuum, without input from the Senate, we risk repeating the mistakes of the past. The Senate is concerned about recent practice whereby decisions that affect the faculty, staff, and students are made without consultation with the appropriate governance bodies. We believe in the concept of shared governance. We believe that faculty, staff, and student participation on the various administrative committees should be mediated through the University Senate or its collegiate level Senates, as has been past practice.

The Senate in December debated and passed a resolution urging the administration to slow down the pace of creation of shared support centers in academic units. The reason is not that we are opposed to change - those of us who have been here 10 years, 23 years, or even 45 years understand full well how far material support for this University has fallen - but that we want to be convinced that at the end of the day, these changes will result in a better, leaner, more efficient, more cost-effective university structure.

Mr. President, you hail most recently from Missouri, the “Show-Me” state. You tell us that restructuring of academic units will result in a more efficient, more cost-effective University, and that the savings will be put into academics, to further the mission of the University. Mr. President, show us the data.

Yes, we are skeptical, but that does not mean we are against the concept. In those special circumstances where it has been employed, such as Arts/Theater Arts, it has apparently been a success, but even this assessment is based on less than one year’s experience. We are skeptical because we have seen no plan - neither a goal nor a road map.

Mr. President, show us the goal. Convince us that this restructuring of academic units will result in better student service, and better support for faculty. Show us that this will result in a more efficient and effective University, or a significant savings in cost. The future is always uncertain; it is only human nature to fear the unknown, and not embrace an uninformed leap into an ill-defined tomorrow.

To ask us - the faculty and staff - to ignore a lifetime of experience in running this University - without letting us see the end goals, or to participate in the means to accomplish them, is unacceptable. We are a university - a college - and we thrive on the collegiality and shared governance implicit in the nature of the university. A university is not a corporation - a university is its people and its programs - and it is not best run in a top-down manner.

You have a plan. Show us the plan. Relieve our concerns.

Mr. President, show us the road map. So far we see a plan that is activated by the appearance of vacancies - this position is unfilled: let's figure out a way to get along without. This is opportunistic at best, and unplanned at worst. Show us the road map. We know there will be bumps on the road, and that we may be forced into long detours. Show us the road map. The road map may change - universities are fluid things - but there must be a plan. Let us see our course and the Senate will constructively engage with you. We are only human: in the absence of the data we fear the darkness. Show us the road map: we are intelligent men and women. We can be convinced by a compelling argument.

The Senate is prepared to stand with you as we - shared governance - embrace and build towards the future.

The State of the Senate is BEWILDERED

We have been re-branded. This, the President tells us, is in the interests of unification of East and West, and to portray a new sense of stability to the world. The President tells us that the response to the new logo has been overwhelmingly positive. As president of the Senate, I get a lot of information I'd sometimes rather not know about. I too get responses to the re-branding. But in this case the responses are overwhelmingly negative and sarcastic.

The President has told us, as recently as our December meeting, that University funding had been cut by \$82 million, and consequently we need to rein in all unnecessary spending. What does it cost to hire an outside consultant to think up a new logo? Is this necessary spending? The President has told us that the University is the economic engine of Long Island. Why was it deemed necessary to hire a firm from Alabama to do design work that surely could have been done locally?

Was the re-branding necessary? We are skeptical. This is another administrative initiative that was carried out without any input from governance, and without any other faculty consultation. Do we need a re-branding? Some of us are quite fond of President Kenny's Stony Brook logo. It says who we are, is colorful, and has significance, at least for astronomers and particle physicists. The shield does none of that, and has been criticized as reminiscent of the slogan of a local oil company.

It has also been noted that it is common for new presidents to make a visible mark on campus. Where is the stability implied if our logo is only as stable as the tenure of the current president?

The State of the Senate is CONCERNED

Morale on campus among the faculty and staff is poor. Despite positive signs, including:

- a large donation from James and Marilyn Simons;
- the lack of a cut to SUNY in the Governor's budget;
- improving academic standards; and
- excellent performances by our intercollegiate sports teams,

the effect of uncertainties regarding the implementation of Shared Support Centers, delays in decisions on permanent appointments, and certain unilateral actions on the part of the administration have affected the morale of the staff. There is a palpable unease on campus. The Senate must remain a place where any member of the community, not only members of the Senate, can feel free to express any opinion without fear of retribution.

The State of the Senate is OPTIMISTIC

There will be a tomorrow, and the Senate will continue its important role in governing the academic functions of the University. In the short term, we

- are working on an Appropriate Use Policy for University computers.
- are working with the Provost and University Counsel to implement the Senior Lectureships approved last year.
- have a voice on the University Council, the Provost's Advisory Group, and the Project 50 Forward Steering Committee.
- are on good terms with the UUP.

In the longer term, we

- seek better recognition for our Distinguished Faculty
- seek to understand the new Budgeting/Responsibility-Centered Management Model, a corporate model that poses challenges in a university environment.
- are engaged with the Provost on reviewing the academic review process.
- expect to play an important role in the upcoming Middle States re-accreditation process.
- are involved in the restructure of the DEC requirements.
- are committed to the development of an overarching environmental vision for the Stony Brook campus.

The State of the Senate is RESOLUTE

in its commitment to preserving academic integrity at Stony Brook University. We are adamant that our authority through shared governance, as vested in the Policies of the Board of Trustees, will not be taken from us. We are committed to this University - this is our community too - and we believe that it is best operated via a shared governance structure. The future may not be ours to know, but it is ours to make. We believe that our best days are ahead of us, but they will not arrive without a lot of effort, and vigilance, on the part of the campus community.

Frederick M. Walter
President, University Senate